

Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP): Update & Certification Training

Given the shortage of water we are facing with the 2014 drought (worst rainfall year on record following 3 below average years), there are many of you who have shed more tears than the moisture you will get from your water district this year. Growers in west side water districts with only saline groundwater are really hurting and paying high prices for any fresh water they can buy.

The huge shadow of this hydrologic disaster has rightfully taken center stage on every grower's radar screen. So, many of you out there have blissfully forgotten that upcoming fertilizer management regulations are still on the table.

What?! In response to lawsuits for not being protective enough of California groundwater (specifically, nitrate contamination from manure and fertilizers applied to irrigated lands) the State Water Resources Control Board and its various Regional Boards began various hearings and development of mandatory fertilizer and groundwater quality reporting requirements back in 2012. The original timeline was ambitious and would have required all farming operations to have a complete NITROGEN MANAGEMENT PLAN (NMP) on file with your area Watershed Coalition (discussed at the end of this newsletter) by the start of 2014. The final "General Order" for the Tulare Lake Basin (<http://www.krwca.org/files/r5-2013-0120.pdf>) was signed September 19, 2013 and establishes the following timeline:

High Vulnerability Groundwater Area (Areas where significant nitrate is already found in the groundwater, or conditions (depth to groundwater, soil texture) that may lead to contamination.)

Small Farming Operations (<60 acres): March 1, 2017 All other: March 1, 2015

Low Vulnerability Groundwater Area

All Farming Operations: March 1, 2017

The NMP has to be reviewed and certified by one of the following methods:

- Self-certified by the Member (grower belonging to the local Watershed Coalition) who attends a California Department of Food and Agriculture or other Executive Officer approved training program for nitrogen plan certification. The Member must retain written documentation of their attendance in the training program; or
- Self-certified by the Member that the plan adheres to a site-specific recommendation from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or the University of California Cooperative Extension. The Member must retain written documentation of the recommendation provided; or

- Certified by a nitrogen management plan specialist as defined in Attachment E of the Order. Such specialists include Professional Soil Scientists, Professional Agronomists, Crop Advisors certified by the American Society of Agronomy, or Technical Service Providers certified in nutrient management in California by the NRCS; or
- Certified in an alternative manner approved by the Executive Officer. Such approval will be provided based on the Executive Officer’s determination that the alternative method for preparing the Nitrogen Management Plan meets the objectives and requirements of the Order.

So the good news is we have time to get our ducks in a row. The “General Order” specifies a variety of possibilities for getting certified and training classes have already started. You have to do the NMP annually and it will be the responsibility of your area Watershed Coalition group to aggregate reports on a section basis to send to the Regional Board. **Standardizing this reporting, certification and eventually “Farm Evaluations” and groundwater analyses are the big challenges.** One current idea is that this would be easier by requiring a Certified Crop Advisor (CCA, not PCA – Pest Control Advisor) to be the preferred channel of review and ‘sign-off’ as a qualified 3rd party reviewer.

This has some merit as the CCA program focuses on overall crop management, is administered at a national level by the American Society of Agronomy, and requires a written test and continuing education units (CEU’s) to stay current. In fact, the current ILRP/NMP workshops being offered through CDFA and UC Cooperative Extension are requiring attendees to be current CCAs (schedule below). This is necessary at this time due to limited space, but right now there are many growers, crop managers and consultants I know who are certainly qualified to create their own NMPs who are not official CCAs. Most of the ILRP training materials are available on-line and future workshops for all interested parties will be offered later this year. Future newsletters (from me and other UCCE advisors) will review some of this material as well as links to current on-line programs and calculators to help you estimate and manage N fertilizer applications for a wide variety of crops. In the meantime I encourage any consultant and grower/technical manager to check out the process to become a CCA.

CCA Certification Exams -- Next Exam Date: August 1, 2014 (Registration opens 5/5/14)

<https://www.certifiedcropadviser.org/>

ASA home page for national CCA

<http://www.cacca.org/home>

Home page for California CCAs

Nitrogen Management Training for Certified Crop Advisors

Developed by:

University of California: Ag & Natural Resources, CA Institute for Water Resources

With support from:

California Department of Food & Agriculture (CDFA)

Fertilizer Research and Education Program (FREP)

California Association of Pest Control Advisers (CAPCA)

REGISTRATION: http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/is/ffldrs/frep/N_MgmtTraining.html

COURSE MATERIALS: <http://ciwr.ucanr.edu/NitrogenManagement/>

**February 25-26, 2014 - Ramada Inn Fresno-University-Shaw Rooms A, B, C
324 E Shaw Ave, Fresno, CA 93710**

**March 5-6, 2014 - Salinas Elks Lodge #614-Main Dining Room
614 Airport Blvd, Salinas, CA 93905**

**March 11-12, 2014 - International Agri-Center-Banquet Hall
4500 S Laspina St, Tulare, CA 93274**

WATERSHED COALITIONS

Finally, a brief word on local Watershed Coalition groups. Many of the current water coalitions have their roots in older USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs). These groups morphed from RCDs to coalitions in the early 2000's when irrigated agriculture in California lost its "Ag Waiver" for not having to report "waste discharge" to the State Water Resources Quality Control Board. These groups took on "regional/basin wide" reporting to the Board to provide a streamlined, least-problem-for-the-local-grower mechanism to satisfy this new permitting obligation. A grower must be a member of a coalition in his own basin to be covered under the new groundwater quality regulations. Web links are provided below for the major coalition groups in the southern San Joaquin Valley. For most growers your best point of contact is through your local water district, but even the managers and technical staff at many water districts are just beginning to feel their way through this process. There are more implementing coalitions than what are listed, but they can be found (now or very soon) on the ssjwqc.org site.

Southern San Joaquin Valley Water Quality Coalition <http://www.ssjwqc.org/>

Kings River Watershed Coalition Authority <http://www.kingsriverwqc.org/>

Kern River Watershed Coalition Authority <http://www.krwca.org/>

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